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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this publication is to encourage and assist high schools in designing elective English courses and programs for grades 10 through 12. After pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of using electives, the discussion shifts to salient questions concerning the planning, construction, and implementation of elective courses and programs; these considerations encompass staffing, length, objectives, instructional methods/materials, and evaluation. A bibliography and specific examples of course descriptions, schedules, student evaluation forms, and teacher planning worksheets are included. (RL)

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ED166707

English Electives in the Senior High School

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FOREWORD

Since 1970, many high schools in New York State have been caught up in a nationwide trend toward electives in the senior high school English program. In 1975, students took 1.5 more English courses than in 1974. Many of the additional courses were electives. This "electives explosion" has stimulated the thinking of school administrators, teachers of English, students, and parents, and has opened up the English curriculum to options heretofore not available to the students. There has also resulted an increased interest in disciplines related to English, and a growing concern with the need for teaching basic skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The commitment to electives embraces a broad spectrum, from programs composed entirely of electives to programs of a few electives to only one elective. There is also a variety of experience; some schools have offered electives for several years, some have had only a year's experience, and some are just now preparing to initiate electives. Regardless of where a school finds itself with respect to electives, that school shares with others a concern that the electives provide a sound program. This concern is mirrored in 1977 by the evaluation of programs in English - and other subjects - by school personnel, evaluative agencies, and the community as well.

The purpose of this publication is to encourage and assist the schools in designing electives. In particular, it will be useful to personnel who are interested in setting up electives or an electives program, personnel who have either electives or an electives program "in place" and are attempting to evaluate either, and personnel who wish to institute, conduct, or evaluate a single elective.

The manuscript for this publication was prepared by the Bureau of English Education, under the direction of Robert Carruthers, Chief of the Bureau. Peter Facos, Director of English, Kenmore Public Schools, contributed materials for the evaluating of electives.

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ELECTIVES IN ENGLISH: POTENTIAL AND PLANNING

I. Definitions

A. Elective

As used in this publication, "elective" refers to any course in English in grades 10-12 which is designed to give the students a choice in their program. The course may be for a week, a few weeks, a semester, a year, or other length. In the choosing of an elective, a student may often be aided by a teacher or other faculty member, or by a parent, and thus, in choosing, may not have complete autonomy. Similarly, in the case of certain schemas for elective programs, a student may truly elect only from a predetermined list of courses. In either case, the experience of schools with outstanding programs suggests that such guidance of students is desirable, even necessary.

B. Electives

The term "electives" refers to more than one elective being offered in grades 10-12. The courses may or may not be organized into a plan.

C. Electives program

The term "electives program" refers to electives in grades 10-12 organized by a carefully structured schema which may involve prerequisites, requirements, sequence, or options.

II. The State program in the English language arts for grades 10-12

The primary goal of the New York State curriculum in English for grades 10-12 is the improvement of skills in reading, composition, speaking, listening, language, and literature. Secondary goals are to develop students' self-awareness, and to provide opportunities for values clarification and cultural maturation. To guide the schools in their planning of these goals, the New York State Education Department has provided the schools of the State with a five-strand K-12 syllabus complete with an articulated developmental sequence of skills.

The schools have considerable latitude in developing a program that meets the above goals. Within the broad framework of the syllabus, there are many options and forms of teaching and administrative and/or teaching strategies that can be employed. However, the basic elements—skills and self-awareness—must be retained.

III. Assessing the school's present program

In recent years, many schools have evaluated their programs and have found that they fail to meet adequately the needs of the individual student. These schools have explored or are exploring alternatives for all or part

of their program. In the Department's view, such alternatives can contribute much, provided that the State syllabus and other content are used to improve the students' skills development and self-awareness.

Most schools contemplating a change in their program are encouraged first to evaluate their existing program: how well the latter achieves the above goals. This study of the program can probably be best achieved by a committee of teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Only after this committee has determined that there is a considerable need and a desire for a substantial revision of the program should any steps be taken to develop a new program. The need must be there; change should not occur mainly for the sake of change. Once the study committee is convinced that the need is there, a determination must be made as to what alternatives will be offered.

One of the most popular and successful alternatives in English used by many schools throughout the country is electives, an electives program, or an elective. Before deciding to use any one of these, the committee charged with reviewing the English program, the English Department representative, and the school administrator must generally agree that:

- There is no rigid and time-honored approach to education that dictates that all students should study the same material, in the same way, or at the same time; nor do all students learn at the same rate, have the same needs, or express the same interests.

- Electives, an electives program, or an elective are viable alternatives that can aid in achieving the goals of skills development and self-awareness.

IV. Advantages of electives, an electives program, or an elective for the students and teachers

Listed below are some strengths which the study committee should note.

In electives, an electives program, or in an elective:

A. All students do not take exactly the same courses. This fact recognizes students' individual differences in needs, interests, and abilities.

B. Students are given an opportunity to make decisions about their education. In so doing, they develop a sense of responsibility that will strengthen their decisionmaking abilities.

C. Because the students have elected their courses, albeit with some guidance, their learning can be self-motivated.

D. Because they are not locked into a rigid step-by-step program, the students have an opportunity to broaden their backgrounds in English, and perhaps even specialize.

E. The students improve their competencies and skills in the English language arts by:

- Refining specific skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening;
- Taking skill-improvement courses in composition, speech, reading, etc.;
- Pursuing special interests in English (science fiction, women in literature, the mass media, the changing English language, the film etc.);
- Learning the skills of communication needed to survive in a social environment;
- Planning for a career (college, business, labor force, etc.);
- Composing poems, essays, short stories, one-act plays;
- Experiencing the culture of diverse ethnic groups, including their own;
- Pursuing an independent study project or investigation;
- Responding to disciplines other than English (art, music, dance);
- Analyzing a theme which is presented in more than one medium (film, story, television, etc.);
- Relating verbally to the world of sports and recreation;
- Using various forms of reportage (articles, interviews, meetings, conferences, etc.);
- Responding to visual stimuli (visual literacy);
- Working with language processes;
- Producing a film or filmstrip.

F. The special abilities and interests of teachers are recognized. The latter are usually assigned courses in which they have a special interest or expertise. This promotes ego-involved instruction.

G. The teacher becomes a facilitator or guide, who directs the students in the art of learning.

H. The teacher, through research, study, and the development of new courses, has an opportunity to grow professionally and is thus spared the possibility of becoming "stale" in teaching the same course year after year.

I. The objectives for the entire English program are often improved, resulting in:

- A shift of emphasis, from content to the students;
- A close examination of the instructional methods being used;
- The expansion of the total English program.

J. There are many opportunities for individualization.

K. There are many opportunities for interdisciplinary study.

L. The teachers draw upon a wide variety of teaching materials. They are not restricted to one or more textbooks, but use multimedia and multilevel materials.

M. Input into the development of courses comes not only from the teachers, but from the students, the parents, the administrators, the guidance counselors, and the school librarians. Thus the tendency for a particular course to become skewed to one point of view is minimized.

N. Courses are evaluated, revised, or eliminated and added as the need may indicate, thus preventing the English curriculum from becoming stagnant.

V. Cautions regarding electives, an electives program, or an elective

Listed below are some cautions that merit consideration by the study committee. Inasmuch as programs vary from school to school, and no two programs are exactly alike, this list, like the above list of strengths, is not intended to be all inclusive.

A. Some students seeking high marks incline to elect an easy course, rather than one designed for their abilities.

B. If an elective is of short duration, some students may have difficulty adjusting to a new teacher every few weeks.

C. Some students are not ready to make decisions for themselves, and therefore have difficulty selecting courses.

D. Some students, when making selections, may not accept or even be aware of their weaknesses.

E. Often the students do not get their first choices of electives and have to settle for their second or third choices.

F. If students are not required to have a balance of electives, they may leave high school with serious gaps in basic skills.

G. Time and money must be provided for the development of courses. Teachers should not be expected to develop courses on their own time.

H. In an elaborate program, some teachers may have to teach a course which they do not want to teach, or for which they feel their background and training are less than adequate.

I. The teaching of electives may require several preparations by the teacher.

J. Electives may cause scheduling problems.

K. Electives should have a demonstrable relationship to the total program. (See below.)

L. The electives or the electives program may be overloaded with courses in one area, especially literature.

VI. Electives or an electives program and the (K-12) program in English

If the study committee concludes that electives or an electives program is desirable, it must then decide upon the type of program to be instituted. There are many types from which to choose. There is no set program; one can be developed to blend with almost any situation, and that in itself is another of its advantages. The electives or the electives program may constitute the entire English program for grades 10-12, or they may supplement the existing program for those grades. There may be full-year courses or semester courses; 10-week courses, 6-week courses, or 2-week courses. There may be minicourses that are given after the regular daily classes have ended or during an activity period. There may be some courses that are open to all students. In the latter, the students are usually grouped heterogeneously, regardless of grade and ability. There can also be a multiple electives approach, in which the student chooses courses in the required areas of literature, oral English, and composition. Whatever the offerings, those who develop them must keep in mind that a balance of courses offering both skills development and self-awareness is essential.

Electives, an electives program, or an elective should be part of a planned total program in English. Like other aspects of the program, they should contain experiences for the students which maintain and improve their skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, language, and literature. Specific skills are suggested in each of the strands of the State K-12 syllabus in English. These skills can be taught in any one of three contexts: (1) as an integral part of the overall content of the elective (see the teacher form for planning an elective, page 23); (2) as a categorical requirement for all students in any elective in a certain grade; or (3) as a separate one-semester course in a skill, such as writing.

Electives, an electives program, or an elective should include at the outset a diagnosis of the students' preparedness based upon the objectives of the course. Informal inventories, pretests, interviews, and standardized diagnostic tests or pretests in the specific skills (in reading, writing, speaking, listening, language, and literature) and knowledge to be gained in the course can be extremely helpful. Also, early in the course the student should be required to develop a brief composition which the teacher should use for informal assessment.

VII. Types of electives; an electives program

A. Skill Electives: These are usually one-semester or 10-week courses in the skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and literature. In these courses, the skills are given the major emphasis. Content is used as an adjunct to skill development. Extensive provision is made for students with varying levels of ability.

B. Interest Electives: These electives are based upon the interests of the students in English-related courses. Each must include work in the above skills, and provisions for students with varying levels of ability. (See Sample elective course descriptions, pages 15-18.)

C. A Phase-Elective Program: One of the more popular and most elaborate of the wide variety of elective programs is the phase-elective program. Many of the latter now used in schools are nongraded, and are phased according to the level of difficulty and the degree of sophistication of the courses. However, the students are not assigned on the basis of academic ability to a particular phase level. Instead, with the help of their teacher or counselor, they select the courses from the different phase levels. It is not unusual for a student to select courses from more than one level. For example, a student weak in language skills may elect a less difficult phase course in language, but a more difficult course in another area in which that student may be stronger. This flexibility enables the student to move from phase to phase, regardless of level, and thus not become stereotyped. In the most effective phase-elective programs, a student must select at least one course, from several offered, from each of the following areas: literature, composition, and oral English.

VIII. Implementing electives or an electives program

Once the study committee has thoroughly evaluated the present English program, determined that electives or an electives program are needed to enrich or replace all or part of the existing program, and has made its recommendations as to the most desirable schema of electives, the mechanics for implementation must be established. It may be too great a task for the study committee to also undertake the implementation. Perhaps an implementation committee should be formed, or the study committee be expanded.

A. Steps in Planning: Planning for electives or an electives program requires commitment, time, and work. It also requires answers to the specific questions suggested below, some of which are followed by one or more possible answers. Other helpful answers are contained in *Alternatives in English,* and in *Some Questions and Answers about Planning Phase-Elective Programs in English.* (See the Bibliography.)

• *What is the first step in planning for the electives?**

The first step is to determine: "What are the objectives for the school's program in English?" "How will the electives contribute to

*These questions about electives apply to electives programs as well.

achieving them?" If the latter question cannot be answered positively, or if it is not clearly evident that for grades 10-12 the electives will either enrich the basic program or constitute the equivalent of the program for these grades, the electives should be rejected. What are the specific needs in skills development and self-awareness of the students? What are the interests and qualifications of the teachers? What evidence reinforces your answer? The decision about whether or not to have the electives should involve inputs from the teachers, the administrators, the counselors, the students, and the parents, and must have the support of the board of education. Each of these groups must make a clear commitment to the electives.

- *Will the electives affect staffing?*

Yes. The key questions to be answered are: (a) Is the school administration sufficiently committed to the rationale for the electives? (b) Does the school have qualified, interested teachers to offer the electives? (c) Can the school justify, educationally and financially, those electives whose enrollments are small? What is the "cut-off" point in class size? For example, should an elective on the mass media be cancelled because only 12 students signed up for the course, even though they are serious students who would benefit from the course? (d) What effect will the popularity (or lack of it) of some teachers have on the students' selection of courses? (e) Will the popularity of a course create problems of morale among the staff?

- *Which electives should be offered?*

This depends upon the answers to the first question. What is the foundation upon which the electives build? Are they part of a sequence begun in the preceding grades? Are they part of a continuum of skills? The electives must reflect the broader objectives for the program in grades 10-12. The offerings should reflect also such factors as the qualifications and the interests of the teachers, scheduling, the cost of implementation, the availability of materials, etc. (See also sample elective course descriptions on pages 15-18, and teacher form for planning an elective, page 23.)

- *How long should the electives be?*

The length of the electives depends partly upon what the electives are designed to accomplish. If the electives are to constitute the program in English for grades 10-12, it would be advisable, in most instances, to consider semester courses. If the electives are to be offered in addition to, or as part of, the basic program, they can be a semester or shorter in duration. However, the shorter the length of time, the more complex the scheduling of the students becomes. (See pages 19-20.)

- *Who should plan the electives?*

The experience of schools with successful electives suggests that the planning should be done chiefly by teachers in the English department under the guidance of a person experienced in curriculum development. (Lacking

such a person, a school district is advised to encourage the teachers to do the inservice work required to provide such a program.) When representative members of the entire English department are included in the planning, there is a better possibility that the electives will fit into the total program, rather than merely appeal to the interests of an individual teacher. Inputs from the students, guidance personnel, the school librarians, and other qualified personnel can be valuable.

- *How should the planning begin?*

Experience suggests that schools initiating electives may well plan only one year at a time, beginning with the senior year (see page 21). Also, the development of a program of information to inform not only the school community but also the general public about the electives is advisable. After inception, this informational program should be continued as a means of keeping all concerned aware of the progress both of the students and of the program.

- *What process is used to select the electives to be taught?*

For the electives heretofore not offered, at least a year before they are offered a committee of teachers should draw up a list of the electives that they are interested in, qualified to teach, and would be willing to offer during the next school year. Ideally, this list should be presented to the students in the form of a questionnaire and/or survey, and the results tabulated before any final decisions on offerings are made. (If there is insufficient time to prepare the questionnaire or survey, the proposed electives should be thoroughly scrutinized by the teachers.) Once the final selections of the courses to be offered are made, the teachers will need "lead time" of at least 6 months in which to plan the courses in detail, to do research, to obtain appropriate materials (often for students with varying levels of ability), and to prepare individualized learning activities where appropriate. Schools inaugurating electives will no doubt find it necessary to finance summer workshops. If two or more teachers teach the same elective, it is well that they at least plan together the objectives, if not also the activities, of the course. If the electives have already been taught, the teachers will need to develop guidelines for the electives for the next year.

- *What about materials; will it be necessary to make large purchases?*

In general, materials are not as serious a problem as one might assume. Electives do not necessarily require the expenditure of large sums of money. Many of the school's existing supplementary and basic texts can be used in new ways. Many sources of materials are available: the bookroom, the school library, the public library, the personal library of the teacher, the State Library, the audiovisual center, the Board of Cooperative Educational Services, etc. In addition, Federal and State funding for special programs should be investigated. The teachers will want to begin with materials that are familiar, but should expand them as quickly as possible. Caution must be exercised to fit the materials to the course, and not develop the course around the existing materials so that savings can be effected.

• *How will the students be informed about course offerings?*

Prior to the adoption of the electives, a detailed, accurate description of each proposed elective course should be prepared and distributed to all students eligible to take it. The description of the course should indicate to the student: (a) prerequisites, if any, (b) the objectives of the course, (c) the content, (d) exactly what the student is to do in the course, e.g., write two essays, do a research project, read three novels, (e) the number of weeks for the course, (f) the number of sessions per week for the course, (g) the number of minutes per class session, (h) the type of examination (local or State) or other evaluation, and (i) credit. (If the school uses modular scheduling, the number of "mods" should also be stated.) These descriptions of courses can be discussed in English classes, be presented in an assembly program, or be published in the school newspaper or program of studies or similar booklet. (See the sample elective course descriptions on pages 15-18.)

• *How will the students decide which courses to take?*

All students should take courses commensurate with their abilities. The teachers of English and the school guidance staff should work closely together in counseling the students in making choices. Every endeavor should be made to help the students base their course selections upon the relationship between their desires, skills, and personal development and the students' English requirements for graduation. Also, every effort should be made to honor the students' choices.

• *How will the idea of electives be accepted?*

Generally, the response of the teachers and the students is favorable to the concept of electives. However, there are those who respond negatively and who find the concept either disturbing or frustrating. Therefore, in a comprehensive program one of the electives might be the option not to choose the electives but to take a regular course instead. (The more comprehensive the program of electives is, the less difficult it is to include this option). Again, in many instances, a combination of the electives and the regular course is preferable.

• *How are the electives scheduled?*

This question cannot be answered easily; much depends on several factors. Is the school on a regular schedule, or is it on a modular schedule? How many electives are to be offered? Are the electives adjuncts to the basic program for grades 10-12; or do the electives constitute the English program for those grades? The scheduling of the electives may also depend on whether an elective has only one section or more than one. In the latter case, the scheduling of one section in the morning and the other in the afternoon helps. Some schools solve the problem by scheduling all electives for the same period. Other schools first schedule all other courses and then schedule the English courses.

B. Evaluating the Electives:* A careful, consistent, and continuous monitoring of the electives is essential. The primary question to be answered is whether or not the electives are doing what they are supposed to do. The answer is related at least partially to the effectiveness of the instruction. Standardized and teacher-made tests can be used to evaluate the students, but many approaches should be used to broaden this evaluation and thus avoid narrow and shallow judgments. Questions such as the following should be answered:

- Does the rationale for the electives hold up under careful analysis? That is, is there an educationally defensible reason for having the electives at all?

- Do the objectives for each elective reflect the broader objectives for the entire program? (If this cannot be determined, perhaps the objectives for the electives are not clear enough to be evaluated.)

- Have the skills of the students improved? Upon their completion of the courses, can the students demonstrate competencies they could not before taking them?

- Are the electives appropriate for the students who take them? Asking a committee to regularly review the program can be helpful. This committee may include not only English teachers but at least one administrator and members of other departments. A rotating schedule of visits to the classes of electives would be helpful.

An annual measure of the attitudes of the students, through a questionnaire,** can be helpful. The questions should be based upon the purposes of the electives. It might be well to include some students on the committee that constructs the questionnaire. A survey should be conducted not only for all electives inclusively, but for the individual courses as well. Do the students feel that they have learned something; has that learning been interesting and useful? Do they have any recommendations for course additions, deletions, or revisions? Statistics on attendance, discipline problems, and the drop-out rate before and after the inception of the electives could serve as indicators of attitude changes, if there are any.

From the results of each of the preceding, a determination must be made about the validity of the electives in the total program. Does each elective contribute to the skills and self-awareness of the students? If a course is lacking in either of these respects, what revisions are necessary to warrant its continued inclusion in the program?

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*See also pages 22-24.

**See page 22.

Teachers' perceptions of the electives should also be surveyed. The following questions offer some guidelines for such a survey:

- What advantages or disadvantages are there in teaching the electives? Are the former any different from those which the teachers projected before the course began? If so, in what way(s)?
- Do the teachers feel that they are teaching in the areas for which they are best qualified?
- Is the preparation time adequate?
- Are the classroom format and atmosphere conducive to a comfortable teaching style?
- Should the program be expanded?

The evaluation process, in addition to the polling of the students and the teachers, should involve the parents as well. Feedback from the parents that would be helpful would be whether or not they feel that their child's needs and interests are being met, and whether they have detected any attitudinal change toward English on the part of their child.

IX. Planning for an elective*

- *What elective should be offered?*

The answer depends upon the program in English for grades 10-12 currently offered in the school. What is this program? Will this elective, if offered, fit into it? If so, how? Any elective that is offered should be based primarily upon the skills, needs, and self-awareness of the students plus the qualifications of the teachers. (However, a course should not be offered merely because its content is a favorite of a particular teacher.) There must be an educationally sound rationale for offering the elective.

- *What should be the objectives for an elective?*

The objectives for the course should be described in terms of student competencies—what will they be able to do at the end of the course that they could not do at the beginning. Where possible, measurable learning objectives for the students and specific teaching objectives for the teacher must be clearly stated and defined. An objective such as "The student will learn to appreciate literature," for example, is too broad. The objective: "Given a specific short story, the student will be able to verbalize how the setting contributes to the overall effect of the story," gives a focus both for the student and for the teacher. In writing the objectives, care must be taken to make them realistic in terms of a student's

*See also pages 6-10 and 19-22, and teacher form for planning an elective, page 23.

time and previous knowledge. For example, it is not realistic to assume that in a minicourse in drama a student will design scenery for all four acts. However, it may be realistic to expect the student to design a costume, a particular prop, or one backdrop.

When the objectives are clearly defined, the student's achievement is more easily measured.

- *Are the students' skills in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, language, and literature maintained and improved?*

Too often an elective may concentrate on one or two of these areas with the neglect of other areas. Ideally, each unit in an elective course involves the direct teaching of skills in all six areas.

- *Will the specific methods of instruction and activities planned contribute to the achievement of the objectives?*

Here some thoughtful questions need to be asked. For instance, for the students learning how to find information in the library, will the filling in of blanks on a ditto sheet about the library contribute as much to learning as actually locating information which must be presented to the class in some form?

Are there choices for the teachers and the students in the methods and the activities? Is there provision for the students to generate their own learning activities?

Are the methods and activities realistic in terms of the time involved and the competence of the students? Sometimes activities take too long for the results achieved, and at other times are done so superficially and hastily that the results are negligible.

The methods and activities should be student-centered rather than teacher-oriented. Group or individual projects, as well as problem-solving situations, will often prove profitable. The making of filmstrips, tapes, videotapes, collages, and posters may be useful as well. Other activities are suggested in the five strands of the State syllabus; still others are described in publications of the National Council of Teachers in English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

In every case, the students should be aware of the purpose of the activity in relation to the attainment of the objectives of the course.

The interests of the students may well be considered in the planning of the activities. For example, for a contribution to the whole class, a photo essay can be produced by a student who has a hobby of photography.

- *What kinds of materials will be needed?*

Textbooks should be selected after, not before the students, the objectives, the program, and the activities have been considered. Too often a course reflects the table of contents of a textbook. Textbooks are

resources, not courses of study. In the achieving of the objectives of a course, a multitext or multimedia approach has proved useful. A list of optional or individualized materials may also be prepared.

• *How are electives best evaluated?*

Valid evaluation, usually difficult, is not made any less so in the case of an elective. Ideally, such evaluation should be an ongoing feature of the course, not only at the end. There are three aspects to be evaluated: the students, the teachers, and the course.

For the first — the students — it is necessary to determine the extent to which the students have achieved the objectives of the course, both in skills and in knowledge. A final examination is one means of accomplishing this, especially if the students are informed of the specific skills and knowledges to be tested and the expectations of the teacher. In this connection, a standardized test can be used as a partial measure, but only if it tests the same objectives as those for the course. A rating or check list of performance on some task is also a valid means of evaluating objectives. Such criteria would have had to be stated in the objectives of the course. Finally, evidence from the affective domain—attitudes, feelings, behavior modification — can provide some indication if elements in the affective domain were objectives in the course.

For the second — the teacher — asking a student or other teacher to observe the class is a helpful technique. Also, the teacher will want to ask and answer such questions as, "Did the students achieve the objectives for the course? What evidence do I have of this? What specific skills did I teach, and was each one mastered by most of the students? Did I give specific assignments designed to extend skills? What provisions did I make for materials for students with varying levels of ability?"

For the third — the elective itself — many techniques of evaluation are useful. Among them are questionnaires to be filled out by the students (see the Form for student evaluation of an elective on page 22); reports from graduates; evaluation by the teacher; the students' performance on State and school examinations; conferences between the teacher and the students; and parents' reactions. (See *Some Questions and Answers on the Planning of a Phase-elective Program in English*, in the Bibliography.)

• *Will credit be given for an elective course?*

If an elective course taken by the student is to be applied toward his or her graduation requirement of four units of credit for English, this course must be the equivalent to one found in a program based upon the State syllabus. Such a course is usually referred to as a Group I ("Constants") course.

If credit for such a course taken by the student is to be applied toward his or her graduation requirements for electives, or if the content of the course is further advanced than that of a Group I course, the course must be submitted for approval to the Bureau of General Education Curriculum Development of the State Education Department. Such a course is usually referred to as a Group III ("Electives") course. **Approval is needed for State diploma credit only.**

For further information about approval of Group I and III courses, see pages 25-26.

X. Assistance available from the State Education Department

The Bureau of English Education provides assistance regarding electives and on the curriculum in English, by mail or telephone, and makes a limited number of consultative visits to school districts and to groups of school districts.

The Bureau of General Education Curriculum Development provides publications for school administrators, and answers, by mail or telephone, requests for assistance.

SAMPLE ELECTIVE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS:

SKILLS ELECTIVES

Reading Skills

Open to: Seniors and Juniors
Credit: 1/2 unit
Number of weeks: 20
Number of sessions per week: 5
Number of minutes per session: 45

This reading skills course focuses on developmental reading as opposed to remedial reading. It will stress study skills, notetaking techniques, word attack skills, an awareness of an author's organization of materials, comprehension, and different purposes in reading (skimming for a detail, finding the main idea, and reading critically.) To improve rate of reading, a reading accelerator will be used. Evaluation will be based on standardized, timed tests given pre and post.

Oral Interpretation

Open to: Seniors, Juniors, Sophomores
Credit: 1/4 unit
Number of weeks: 10
Number of sessions per week: 5
Number of minutes per session: 45

The purpose of this course is to teach students how to make their voices as pleasant as possible. They will experiment with different emphases and inflection in order to discover how these elements can change meaning. They will learn how and when to phrase, how to make a practice copy for use in reading aloud, and how to read aloud with poise.

All readings are kept short so that the students are able to read more often and to experiment with many types of material. Each student will read approximately ten selections, and will be given the opportunity to analyze his or her performance before receiving the comments of the class or the instructor. All readings will be recorded for self-evaluation. The final examination will be in the form of a reading to the class.

Creative Writing II (Advanced Prose) - Prerequisite: Creative Writing I or permission of the instructor

Open to: Advanced writers
Credit: 1/2 unit
Number of weeks: 20
Number of sessions: 5
Number of minutes per session: 45

This course is recommended only for the serious student of creative prose writing. It will be advanced study of the techniques of writing prose

fiction. The student will help set his or her own goals, with an emphasis on the development of individual style.

Students will learn to use Writers' Digest and Writers' Market, and they will receive instruction in the techniques of record-keeping for free-lance writers. They will also learn how to prepare manuscripts for submission to publishers. Final evaluation will be in the form of a creative writing selection.

INTEREST ELECTIVES

Black Literature

Open to:	Seniors and Juniors	Number of weeks:	10
Credit:	1/4 unit	Number of sessions per week:	5
		Number of minutes per session:	45

This course is organized into ten units designed to acquaint the student with American Black authors and leaders from all periods of our history. A different unit will be covered each week. The students will select from four to eight units, depending upon the final grade they contract to earn.

Although there is much reading involved, the course is divided into three levels so that the material is appropriate to all ages and types of students. Many tapes and records are listed as alternatives to readings. Students will participate in discussions in each of the units. At the end of each unit, a student must hand in an essay dealing with the readings or work in that unit. The units are: "Slavery," "Freedom," "Identity and Reality," "The Ghetto," "Unrest," Rebellion and Violence," "Heroes," "Black Is Beautiful," and "Making It—We Have Overcome." As time allows, there will also be an opportunity for culture studies limited only by student talent.

Career Planning (Required Grade 11)

Open to:	Juniors only	Number of weeks:	10
Credit:	1/4 unit	Number of sessions per week:	5
		Number of minutes per session:	45

Taught in cooperation with the Guidance Department, Career Planning is an individual course in which students will examine their own personalities, talents, and desires, and do research in possible careers. Emphasis will be on the practical: filling out forms, making applications, interview techniques, college financing, selection of college, etc.

Humanities

Open to: Seniors, Juniors, Sophomores
Credit: 1/2 unit
Number of weeks: 20
Number of sessions per week: 5
Number of minutes per session: 45

Students taking this course will learn basic elements in the arts, poetry, music, and drama. The course is designed to provide direct and indirect experiences in each of these. The first ten weeks are devoted to the characteristics of the arts, the interrelationships of the arts, and a comparative study of four stylistic periods: Classicism, Romanticism, Impressionism, and Expressionism. During the second ten weeks, various topics are studied from the viewpoint of the artist, the musician, and the writer. The readings include plays by Aristophanes, the Book of Job, and poetry by T.S. Eliot. Use is made of slide projection for the viewing of art, stereo tape for listening to music, and films for reinforcement. Skills in presenting orally or in writing are emphasized. Student projects constitute the final examination.

PHASE ELECTIVES

Justice and the Law

Phase: 4
Open to: Seniors, Juniors
Credit: 1/2 unit
Number of weeks: 20
Number of sessions per week: 5
Number of minutes per session: 45

This course will be divided into three segments. Part I will deal with law itself, and a special stress on the laws that affect everyone. Part II will deal with the judicial system and the interpretation of various laws by the courts. Part III will deal with the role of the police in a free society. The portrayal of law enforcers in literature past and present will be examined and discussed. Guest speakers will also be invited to express their views of the role of police in our society. Reading selections will include paperback editions of Up Against the Law, Inherit the Wind, and Twelve Angry Men. Outside reading assignments will be individualized according to the student's own reading ability. There will be no final examination. Grades will be determined by scores on quizzes, work on projects, and contributions to class discussion.

Modern Novel

Phase: 5
Prerequisite: 85 on English Regents examination
Credit: 1/2 unit
Number of weeks: 20
Number of sessions per week: 5
Number of minutes per session: 45

For good readers who want to work independently, the Modern Novel course provides guidance in the study of five novels written since 1960. Each novel will be studied with the aid of a Learning Activity Packet (LAP) designed to provide a variety of options on related topics and to allow a variety of types of responses: papers, oral reports, panel presentations, debates, creative writing, and presentations. The course will not be a "read and discuss" course; only a limited number of open discussion sessions will be held. The class period will be used for reading, preparing topics and projects, consulting with the teacher, or working in small groups on special projects. The final examination will be in the form of a report or presentation.

TIME SEGMENTS FOR ELECTIVES IN GRADES 10-12: OPTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

A. Length of course: Many variables affect the length of the course:

- staffing
- scheduling
- materials
- flexibility

Several suggested time segments are illustrated below.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">One Year</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">20 weeks</td><td colspan="3">20 weeks</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">13+ weeks</td><td colspan="2">13+ weeks</td><td colspan="2">13+ weeks</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">10 weeks</td><td colspan="2">10 weeks</td><td colspan="2">10 weeks</td></tr>
<tr><td>6 wks</td><td>6 wks</td><td>8 wks</td><td>6 wks</td><td>6 wks</td><td>8 wks</td></tr>
</table>

B. Suggested teachers' schedules

Teacher A (School A)		Teacher B (School B)	
1st Period:	English 10	1st Period:	Film 10 wks-Fall
2nd Period:	English 10		Theatre 10 wks-Fall
4th Period:	Adv. Comp. (Fall) 20 wks		Poetry 10 wks-Spring
	Creative Writing (Spring) 20 wks		Dramatic Works 10 wks-Spring
5th Period:	Public Speaking (Fall) 20 wks	2nd Period:	English 12
	Dramatics (Spring) 20 wks	3rd Period:	English 12
7th Period:	English 10	5th Period:	English 12
		7th Period:	Film 10 wks-Fall
			Theatre 10 wks-Fall
			Poetry 10 wks-Spring
			Dramatic Works 10 wks-Spring

C. Suggested options for students

1. Student C (School C) selects

<table>
<tr><td>12 Public Speaking
10 wks</td><td>Advanced Composition
10 wks</td><td>American Novel
10 wks</td><td>Reading for College
10 wks</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">11 Mass Media
Speaking and Listening
20 weeks</td><td colspan="2">Contemporary Prose and Poetry
Reading
20 weeks</td></tr>
</table>

N.B. Specific skills are taught e.g. during the first 20 weeks, Speaking and Listening; during the second 20 weeks, Reading

10 "Regular" course: Emphasis on skills, together with content

2. Student D (School D) selects:

12 "Regular" course: Emphasis on skills, together with content			
11 Composition 17 weeks	Speaking and Listening 3 weeks	Myths and Legends 17 weeks	Reading 3 weeks
10 "Regular" course: Emphasis on skills, together with content			

3. Student E (School E) selects:

12 Mass Media	Careers	Short Story	Advanced Composition
11 American Literature	Speaking and Listening	Composition	
10 "Regular" course: Emphasis on skills, together with content			

A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR INITIATING AN ELECTIVES PROGRAM

IF YOU ARE LIMITED IN STAFF, TIME, AND MONEY

Do not attempt to offer too many electives at first. Have enough courses to insure that the program is truly elective. Strengthen the courses each time they are given and continue to provide for individual differences within those courses.

Begin with the 12th grade - especially if the Regents examination is given at the end of the 11th year. This does not threaten those on the staff or in the community who fear that the electives will harm the English program. The confidence and cooperation of the Guidance Department are essential. Schedule the electives internally in the English Department. The Guidance personnel can schedule the student in a period of the day for English, and the English teachers can plan their four 10-week quarters from that point (after orientation in the English classroom in the Junior year.) Ten-week courses will allow more choices; however, 10-week courses pose many scheduling problems.

Inasmuch as in most electives in literature there will be a wide range of ability, make an effort to choose two or three books for each unit. Many older anthologies contain selections for different courses. Scheduling their use accordingly among the different electives and teachers will help to solve the shortage of materials.

For information on an "Electives Bank," write to the Bureau of English Education, State Education Department, Albany, New York 12234.

FORM FOR STUDENT EVALUATION OF AN ELECTIVES PROGRAM

GENERAL QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to get some idea of what you think about the present English electives program in general, and the electives you have taken or are currently taking, we are asking you to complete the following questionnaire. Please read the items carefully.

1. Did you find the electives program to be a worthwhile experience?
   Yes _____ No _____
2. Was the ten-week period sufficient time to spend in the elective?
   Yes _____ No _____
3. Did you like having a variety of teachers?
   Yes _____ No _____
4. What do you consider to be the strong points of the electives program? _____

   _____
5. What do you consider to be the weak points of the electives program?

   _____
6. In which of the following areas do you feel you have made progress? Please check. (You may check more than one.)
   _____ Writing _____ Listening _____ Speaking _____ Reading
7. In which of the following areas do you feel you have made little or no progress? Please check. (You may check more than one.)
   _____ Writing _____ Listening _____ Speaking _____ Reading
8. Do you feel that your interests were better met in this electives program than they would have been in a traditional full-year English program?
   Yes _____ No _____
9. How many courses did you take that were your first or second choice? Please circle.
   1 2 3 4
10. Do you think this program should be continued?
    Yes _____ No _____
11. What suggestions do you have that you think could improve the program? _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

TEACHER FORM FOR PLANNING AN ELECTIVE

Course title: _____

Course description: _____

_____

Materials and requirements: _____

_____

Course objectives and approach: _____

_____

How skills will be developed:

1. Reading _____

   _____

2. Writing _____

   _____

3. Speaking _____

   _____

4. Listening _____

   _____

Basis for the student's mark: _____

_____

Method for evaluating the course: _____

_____

_____

FORM FOR STUDENT EVALUATION OF AN ELECTIVE:

EVALUATION OF ENGLISH 12 ELECTIVE

TITLE OF ELECTIVE _____

1. Amount: On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = none; 5 = too much) evaluate the following areas. Please circle the number.

Amount of READING	1	2	3	4	5
WRITING	1	2	3	4	5
SPEAKING	1	2	3	4	5
LISTENING	1	2	3	4	5
HOMEWORK	1	2	3	4	5
DISCUSSION	1	2	3	4	5
LECTURE	1	2	3	4	5
INDEPENDENT WORK	1	2	3	4	5
AUDIOVISUAL AIDS	1	2	3	4	5

2. Difficulty: On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = too easy; 5 = too difficult), evaluate the following areas. Please circle the number.

Difficulty of READING MATERIAL	1	2	3	4	5
WRITING ASSIGNMENTS	1	2	3	4	5
HOMEWORK	1	2	3	4	5
LECTURES	1	2	3	4	5
INDEPENDENT WORK	1	2	3	4	5

3. Value: Please check the description which most nearly reflects your opinion concerning the value of the following areas.

	No value	Some value	Very valuable
Value of READING MATERIALS	_____	_____	_____
WRITING ASSIGNMENTS	_____	_____	_____
SPEAKING ACTIVITIES	_____	_____	_____
HOMEWORK	_____	_____	_____
DISCUSSION	_____	_____	_____
LECTURE	_____	_____	_____
INDEPENDENT WORK	_____	_____	_____
AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS	_____	_____	_____

4. How many books did you read for this elective? _____

5. Would you recommend that this elective be continued _____
dropped _____ changed _____?

6. Please make additional comments or suggestions.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF COURSES FOR STATE DIPLOMA CREDIT*

For each application the following must be submitted:

1. Three copies of this application
2. Two copies of the detailed course of study
3. A list of the textbooks and reference books to be used

1. Name of school _____ County _____
2. Mailing address _____
3. Title of course _____
4. Course offered in grade(s): 9 10 11 12
5. Prerequisites, if any _____
6. Specially designed for slow learners _____ average _____ above average _____
7. Course will meet _____ weeks for _____ periods a week. Length of period is _____ minutes.
8. Number of minutes outside preparation, if any _____
9. Date course will begin _____ number of sessions _____ expected enrollment in each _____ required _____ elective _____
10. Course will be used for: local diploma credit _____ State diploma credit _____
11. Credit will be given under diploma requirements for: Group I, Group 2, Group 3
12. Name of teacher _____ Type of certificate _____ Valid for what subjects _____ Date of certificate _____ College major _____ College minor _____

Pertinent information relevant to background for teaching this specific course: (For example, a teacher for a local course in English should give specific names of the courses he has taken in this field and in related areas.) _____

_____

_____

_____

Date _____ Signature of principal _____

*Actual forms may be obtained from the Bureau of General Education Curriculum Development, State Education Department, Albany, New York 12234.

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF COURSES FOR STATE DIPLOMA CREDIT

(continued)

In English, the new State syllabus is based upon skills in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, language, and literature. It is expected, then, that any course submitted for credit under Group I (Constants) will give considerable attention to skills in these areas. The content of a course submitted for credit under Group III (Electives) must be significantly advanced beyond the level of content of a Group I course.

A course of study in English submitted for review or approval, under Group I or Group III, to the Bureau of General Education Curriculum Development of the State Education Department, must include, and in this order: 1. A rationale/preface, indicating the reasons for offering this particular course to these particular students; 2. An outline describing first, the specific objectives for the course, expressed in terms of the students; second, content, including the specific units or other sub-topics to be used together with the time allotments for each; third, the specific activities, including work in skills, to be carried on by the students; and fourth, the specific materials to be used; 3. Evaluation, including the specific techniques to be used to evaluate the achievement and/or other objectives for the students; and 4. A bibliography of all references to be used in the course.

The rationale/preface and outline description must be clearly presented so that a teacher other than the writer of the course might use it effectively. It must be complete in all respects, and must show a rational relationship among its various sections.

NOTE:

(1) Courses offered for local diploma purposes only need not be submitted for approval.

(2) Courses offered only to fulfill a part of the Group 1 requirement in the senior high school need not be submitted for approval. (It is expected that these would fall within the framework of the State syllabus.)

(3) Courses less than a semester in length should not be submitted for approval.

(4) Course descriptions for local courses of any type may be reviewed on a sampling basis by the Bureau of English Education. That bureau may also wish to review total English programs on a sampling basis by either having program descriptions submitted or through supervisory visits.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Below are listed valuable aids for the planning of electives, an electives program, or an elective. Also, consult the Education Index for current entries.

1. English Journal. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English. (NCTE) April 1974 issue, pp. 29 - 41.

   The articles on these pages suggest perspectives on electives and minicourses which are meaningful to all teachers of English.

2. English Language Arts (Composition K-12, Language K-12, Listening and Speaking K-12, Literature K-12, and Reading K-12) Albany, New York: The State Education Department.

   Each of the above strands indicates specific skills to be given attention at particular levels (K-3,4-6,7-9, 10-12).

3. Hillocks, George. Alternatives in English: A Critical Appraisal of Elective Programs. Urbana, Illinois: ERIC, National Council of Teachers of English. (NCTE) 1972. 154 pp. $3.95; $3.35 to NCTE members.

   This comprehensive study of 76 guides for elective programs delineates the strengths and weaknesses of typical electives programs in the nation.

4. Optional Education Programs. Optional Education Office. Albany, New York: The State Education Department. 1974, 60 pp. Free to registered secondary schools.

   This comprehensive study describes alternate education programs in schools of New York State: community-centered education, storefront academies, learning centers, on-the-job training, and similar programs. Many of these reflect the basic elements of an electives program in English and other subjects.

5. Palmatier, Larry, and Millie Martin. "Guidelines for Establishing an Electives Program." English Journal, April 1976. pp. 28-31

   In this article, the authors cite factors to be considered in planning not only a program of electives, but many guidelines for curriculum development in general. The guidelines emphasize the importance of input by teachers and students, and cooperation from school administrators.

6. Rounds, Jeannis Crandall. "Caution: Elective Program Ahead." English Journal. November 1972 issue, pp. 1225-1231.

   This article suggests specific techniques and cautions for planning a totally elective program of 10-week minicourses. The author confronts and solves some crucial problems in this planning.

7. Some Questions and Answers About Planning Phase-Elective Programs in English: Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) 1972. 39 pp. $1.95; $1.75 to NCTE members.

   This brochure describes techniques for the planning, teaching, and evaluating of electives or an electives program. The suggestions are thought-provoking, are based upon experience, and are supported by research.

8. Stokes, Ruth. "Elective English: A Report on the State of the Art." English Journal, April 1976 issue. pp. 14-15.

   This article deals with common failings of electives courses, including poor choice of content or materials, lack of attention to skills, lack of relationship to the overall program, and lack of coherence or sequence. The author suggests that the program of electives should concentrate upon process rather than content and upon the cognitive and emotional development of students.

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